



Living Well

January is Crime Stoppers Month

UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL SAFETY

Personal safety is seldom discussed until something happens. A proactive approach to this important issue may prevent tragedy. These practical tips serve to remind us not to take our personal safety for granted.

Thinking Safe and Being Safe

Position: The key to practicing safe behavior is increasing our awareness of our surroundings.

- Stay alert and maintain a 360° awareness.
- Watch the shadows for motion or activity.
- Whenever possible, travel in familiar areas and know the location of phones and public places, such as restaurants or businesses, that are open.
- Be aware of any vulnerable spots such as alleys, vacant lots and construction sites. Avoid malfunctioning street lights. **Don't** take short cuts – these “time savers” can increase your chances of getting lost.
- It is recommended to maintain a personal space of at least six feet from someone who makes us uncomfortable. This provides time to plan an escape route, if necessary.

Presence: Don't make yourself an easy target.

- When you're walking, communicate that you are confident. A calm, purposeful walk indicates that you know where you're going. Keep your head up and don't be afraid to make eye contact with people around you.
- Whether walking, jogging, biking or driving, experts recommend that you don't wear earbuds or a cellphone headset; they distract you and also make you a target because you can't hear someone approach until it's too late.

- What you wear can make you a target. It's difficult to run in baggy pants or high-heeled shoes. It's difficult to maintain peripheral vision wearing sunglasses with thick, oversized arms. Realize that you draw attention to yourself by wearing desirable jewelry, purses or other items.

Protect: Some people opt to use a personal safety device. Consider the following pros and cons.

- Are you willing to actually use the device you've selected? If not, it may be used against you.
- Chemical (Pepper) Spray comes in various forms. You should know *what* the spray pattern is (this varies from 8' to 15'), *how* to activate the device, *when* it expires (chemical sprays have a shelf-life) and *when they are not effective* (high wind, rain, etc.).
- Whistles are very inexpensive, easy to use and will attract attention if you need help. The *risks* of a whistle include wearing it around the neck, which could cause you to be choked by an attacker.
- Personal alarm systems emit a high pitched noise. They are small, portable and easy to use.

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The *disadvantages* of an alarm are that it won't work if the batteries are dead, and some people have become desensitized to the noise (it's just another car alarm, etc.)

- One of our best personal safety devices is our intuition. When it comes to safety, err on the side of caution: **trust your gut!**

Plan: Even though it is difficult to think about, it is important to be prepared in the event you are ever confronted with an unsafe situation. Safety experts tell us to be proactive. Think about how you would respond if confronted by someone. Would you yell or scream? Would you choose to physically resist or fight? Or would you run away? Remember the following suggestions:

- Whenever possible keep as much distance between yourself and the other person as you can and determine an escape route.
- Remain calm and try not to panic. Panic impairs our judgment and causes us to make bad choices or take risks we wouldn't normally take.
- If someone is only after your property, experts advise that you don't resist. Give it up.

React: If you believe you will be physically attacked, the most effective resistance strategies are:

- Running (81%)
- Physical resistance (75%)
- Yelling (63%) - Attract attention to yourself whenever possible. Yell "Hey you, call the

police!" - even if no one is there, or yell "Fire!" - even if there isn't one. This may distract your assailant and give you time to escape. Pleading has the lowest success rate.

If, in spite of all your efforts you are involved in an incident, it is important to take the following steps as soon as possible:

- Call the police and identify yourself, your location and whether you need medical assistance.
- Make a conscious effort to get an accurate description of the attacker, car, etc. including height, weight, body build, age, race, complexion, type and color of clothing.
- Write down any information you can recall. Under stress, we often forget important details.

The internet has opened up another arena for safety. Experts recommend that you do not share personal information with people you have recently met on the internet. It is also recommended that when meeting someone you don't know well, you meet in a public place.

Thinking safe means being safe.

For more information about personal safety, or advice on other work/life issues, contact SYMMETRY at (414) 256-4800 or (800) 236-7905 for confidential assistance.



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